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This article was intended to introduce a larger work which Engels planned to call *Die drei Grundformen der Knechtschaft – Outline of the General Plan*. Engels never finished it, nor even this intro, which breaks off at the end. It would be included in *Dialectics of Nature*.

The Part played by Labour in the Transition from Ape to Man

Labour is the source of all wealth, the political economists assert. And it really is the source – next to nature, which supplies it with the material that it converts into wealth. But it is even infinitely more than this. It is the prime basic condition for all human existence, and this to such an extent that, in a sense, we have to say that labour created man himself.

Many hundreds of thousands of years ago, during an epoch, not yet definitely determinable, of that period of the earth's history known to geologists as the Tertiary period, most likely towards the end of it, a particularly highly-developed race of anthropoid apes lived somewhere in the tropical zone – probably on a great continent that has now sunk to the bottom of the Indian Ocean. ^[1] Darwin has given us an approximate description of these ancestors of ours. They were completely covered with hair, they had beards and pointed ears, and they lived in bands in the trees.

First, owing to their way of living which meant that the hands had different functions than the feet when climbing, these apes began to lose the habit of using their hands to walk and adopted a more and more erect posture. This was *the decisive step in the transition from ape to man*.

All extant anthropoid apes can stand erect and move about on their feet alone, but only in case of urgent need and in a very clumsy way. Their natural gait is in a half-

erect posture and includes the use of the hands. The majority rest the knuckles of the fist on the ground and, with legs drawn up, swing the body through their long arms, much as a cripple moves on crutches. In general, all the transition stages from walking on all fours to walking on two legs are still to be observed among the apes today. The latter gait, however, has never become more than a makeshift for any of them.

It stands to reason that if erect gait among our hairy ancestors became first the rule and then, in time, a necessity, other diverse functions must, in the meantime, have devolved upon the hands. Already among the apes there is some difference in the way the hands and the feet are employed. In climbing, as mentioned above, the hands and feet have different uses. The hands are used mainly for gathering and holding food in the same way as the fore paws of the lower mammals are used. Many apes use their hands to build themselves nests in the trees or even to construct roofs between the branches to protect themselves against the weather, as the chimpanzee, for example, does. With their hands they grasp sticks to defend themselves against enemies, or bombard their enemies with fruits and stones. In captivity they use their hands for a number of simple operations copied from human beings. It is in this that one sees the great gulf between the undeveloped hand of even the most man-like apes and the human hand that has been highly perfected by hundreds of thousands of years of labour. The number and general arrangement of the bones and muscles are the same in both hands, but the hand of the lowest savage can perform hundreds of operations that no simian hand can imitate – no simian hand has ever fashioned even the crudest stone knife.

The first operations for which our ancestors gradually learned to adapt their hands during the many thousands of years of transition from ape to man could have been only very simple ones. The lowest savages, even those in whom regression to a more animal-like condition with a simultaneous physical degeneration can be assumed, are nevertheless far superior to these transitional beings. Before the first flint could be fashioned into a knife by human hands, a period of time probably elapsed in comparison with which the historical period known to us appears insignificant. But the decisive step had been taken, *the hand had become free* and could henceforth attain ever greater dexterity; the greater flexibility thus acquired was inherited and increased from generation to generation.

Thus the hand is not only the organ of labour, *it is also the product of labour*. Only by labour, by adaptation to ever new operations, through the inheritance of muscles, ligaments, and, over longer periods of time, bones that had undergone special development and the ever-renewed employment of this inherited finesse in new, more and more complicated operations, have given the human hand the high

degree of perfection required to conjure into being the pictures of a Raphael, the statues of a Thorwaldsen, the music of a Paganini.

But the hand did not exist alone, it was only one member of an integral, highly complex organism. And what benefited the hand, benefited also the whole body it served; and this in two ways.

In the first place, the body benefited from the law of correlation of growth, as Darwin called it. This law states that the specialised forms of separate parts of an organic being are always bound up with certain forms of other parts that apparently have no connection with them. Thus all animals that have red blood cells without cell nuclei, and in which the head is attached to the first vertebra by means of a double articulation (condyles), also without exception possess lacteal glands for suckling their young. Similarly, cloven hoofs in mammals are regularly associated with the possession of a multiple stomach for rumination. Changes in certain forms involve changes in the form of other parts of the body, although we cannot explain the connection. Perfectly white cats with blue eyes are always, or almost always, deaf. The gradually increasing perfection of the human hand, and the commensurate adaptation of the feet for erect gait, have undoubtedly, by virtue of such correlation, reacted on other parts of the organism. However, this action has not as yet been sufficiently investigated for us to be able to do more here than to state the fact in general terms.

Much more important is the direct, demonstrable influence of the development of the hand on the rest of the organism. It has already been noted that our simian ancestors were gregarious; it is obviously impossible to seek the derivation of man, the most social of all animals, from non-gregarious immediate ancestors. Mastery over nature began with the development of the hand, with labour, and widened man's horizon at every new advance. He was continually discovering new, hitherto unknown properties in natural objects. On the other hand, the development of labour necessarily helped to bring the members of society closer together by increasing cases of mutual support and joint activity, and by making clear the advantage of this joint activity to each individual. In short, men in the making arrived at the point where *they had something to say* to each other. Necessity created the organ; the undeveloped larynx of the ape was slowly but surely transformed by modulation to produce constantly more developed modulation, and the organs of the mouth gradually learned to pronounce one articulate sound after another.

Comparison with animals proves that this explanation of the origin of language from and in the process of labour is the only correct one. The little that even the most highly-developed animals need to communicate to each other does not

require articulate speech. In its natural state, no animal feels handicapped by its inability to speak or to understand human speech. It is quite different when it has been tamed by man. The dog and the horse, by association with man, have developed such a good ear for articulate speech that they easily learn to understand any language within their range of concept. Moreover they have acquired the capacity for feelings such as affection for man, gratitude, etc., which were previously foreign to them. Anyone who has had much to do with such animals will hardly be able to escape the conviction that in many cases they now feel their inability to speak as a defect, although, unfortunately, it is one that can no longer be remedied because their vocal organs are too specialised in a definite direction. However, where vocal organs exist, within certain limits even this inability disappears. The buccal organs of birds are as different from those of man as they can be, yet birds are the only animals that can learn to speak; and it is the bird with the most hideous voice, the parrot, that speaks best of all. Let no one object that the parrot does not understand what it says. It is true that for the sheer pleasure of talking and associating with human beings, the parrot will chatter for hours at a stretch, continually repeating its whole vocabulary. But within the limits of its range of concepts it can also learn to understand what it is saying. Teach a parrot swear words in such a way that it gets an idea of their meaning (one of the great amusements of sailors returning from the tropics); tease it and you will soon discover that it knows how to use its swear words just as correctly as a Berlin costermonger. The same is true of begging for titbits.

First labour, after it and then with it speech – these were the two most essential stimuli under the influence of which the brain of the ape gradually changed into that of man, which, for all its similarity is far larger and more perfect. Hand in hand with the development of the brain went the development of its most immediate instruments – the senses. Just as the gradual development of speech is inevitably accompanied by a corresponding refinement of the organ of hearing, so the development of the brain as a whole is accompanied by a refinement of all the senses. The eagle sees much farther than man, but the human eye discerns considerably more in things than does the eye of the eagle. The dog has a far keener sense of smell than man, but it does not distinguish a hundredth part of the odours that for man are definite signs denoting different things. And the sense of touch, which the ape hardly possesses in its crudest initial form, has been developed only side by side with the development of the human hand itself, through the medium of labour.

The reaction on labour and speech of the development of the brain and its attendant senses, of the increasing clarity of consciousness, power of abstraction and of conclusion, gave both labour and speech an ever-renewed impulse to further development. This development did not reach its conclusion when man finally

became distinct from the ape, but on the whole made further powerful progress, its degree and direction varying among different peoples and at different times, and here and there even being interrupted by local or temporary regression. This further development has been strongly urged forward, on the one hand, and guided along more definite directions, on the other, by a new element which came into play with the appearance of fully-fledged man, namely, *society*.

Hundreds of thousands of years – of no greater significance in the history of the earth than one second in the life of man [Engels note: A leading authority in this respect, Sir William Thomson, has calculated that little more than a hundred million years could have elapsed since the time when the earth had cooled sufficiently for plants and animals to be able to live on it.] – certainly elapsed before human society arose out of a troupe of tree-climbing monkeys. Yet it did finally appear. And what do we find once more as the characteristic difference between the troupe of monkeys and human society? Labour. The ape herd was satisfied to browse over the feeding area determined for it by geographical conditions or the resistance of neighbouring herds; it undertook migrations and struggles to win new feeding grounds, but it was incapable of extracting from them more than they offered in their natural state, except that it unconsciously fertilised the soil with its own excrement. As soon as all possible feeding grounds were occupied, there could be no further increase in the ape population; the number of animals could at best remain stationary. But all animals waste a great deal of food, and, in addition, destroy in the germ the next generation of the food supply. Unlike the hunter, the wolf does not spare the doe which would provide it with the young the next year; the goats in Greece, that eat away the young bushes before they grow to maturity, have eaten bare all the mountains of the country. This “predatory economy” of animals plays an important part in the gradual transformation of species by forcing them to adapt themselves to other than the usual food, thanks to which their blood acquires a different chemical composition and the whole physical constitution gradually alters, while species that have remained unadapted die out. There is no doubt that this predatory economy contributed powerfully to the transition of our ancestors from ape to man. In a race of apes that far surpassed all others in intelligence and adaptability, this predatory economy must have led to a continual increase in the number of plants used for food and the consumption of more and more edible parts of food plants. In short, food became more and more varied, as did also the substances entering the body with it, substances that were the chemical premises for the transition to man.

But all that was not yet labour in the proper sense of the word. Labour begins with the making of tools. And what are the most ancient tools that we find – the most ancient judging by the heirlooms of prehistoric man that have been discovered, and by the mode of life of the earliest historical peoples and of the rawest of

contemporary savages? They are hunting and fishing implements, the former at the same time serving as weapons. But hunting and fishing presuppose the transition from an exclusively vegetable diet to the concomitant use of meat, and this is another important step in the process of transition from ape to man. A *meat diet* contained in an almost ready state the most essential ingredients required by the organism for its metabolism. By shortening the time required for digestion, it also shortened the other vegetative bodily processes that correspond to those of plant life, and thus gained further time, material and desire for the active manifestation of animal life proper. And the farther man in the making moved from the vegetable kingdom the higher he rose above the animal. Just as becoming accustomed to a vegetable diet side by side with meat converted wild cats and dogs into the servants of man, so also adaptation to a meat diet, side by side with a vegetable diet, greatly contributed towards giving bodily strength and independence to man in the making. The meat diet, however, had its greatest effect on the brain, which now received a far richer flow of the materials necessary for its nourishment and development, and which, therefore, could develop more rapidly and perfectly from generation to generation. With all due respect to the vegetarians man did not come into existence without a meat diet, and if the latter, among all peoples known to us, has led to cannibalism at some time or other (the forefathers of the Berliners, the Weletabians or Wilzians, used to eat their parents as late as the tenth century), that is of no consequence to us today.

The meat diet led to two new advances of decisive importance – the harnessing of fire and the domestication of animals. The first still further shortened the digestive process, as it provided the mouth with food already, as it were, half-digested; the second made meat more copious by opening up a new, more regular source of supply in addition to hunting, and moreover provided, in milk and its products, a new article of food at least as valuable as meat in its composition. Thus both these advances were, in themselves, new means for the emancipation of man. It would lead us too far afield to dwell here in detail on their indirect effects notwithstanding the great importance they have had for the development of man and society.

Just as man learned to consume everything edible, he also learned to live in any climate. He spread over the whole of the habitable world, being the only animal fully able to do so of its own accord. The other animals that have become accustomed to all climates – domestic animals and vermin – did not become so independently, but only in the wake of man. And the transition from the uniformly hot climate of the original home of man to colder regions, where the year was divided into summer and winter, created new requirements – shelter and clothing as protection against cold and damp, and hence new spheres of labour, new forms of activity, which further and further separated man from the animal.

By the combined functioning of hand, speech organs and brain, not only in each individual but also in society, men became capable of executing more and more complicated operations, and were able to set themselves, and achieve, higher and higher aims. The work of each generation itself became different, more perfect and more diversified. Agriculture was added to hunting and cattle raising; then came spinning, weaving, metalworking, pottery and navigation. Along with trade and industry, art and science finally appeared. Tribes developed into nations and states. Law and politics arose, and with them that fantastic reflection of human things in the human mind – religion. In the face of all these images, which appeared in the first place to be products of the mind and seemed to dominate human societies, the more modest productions of the working hand retreated into the background, the more so since the mind that planned the labour was able, at a very early stage in the development of society (for example, already in the primitive family), to have the labour that had been planned carried out by other hands than its own. All merit for the swift advance of civilisation was ascribed to the mind, to the development and activity of the brain. Men became accustomed to explain their actions as arising out of thought instead of their needs (which in any case are reflected and perceived in the mind); and so in the course of time there emerged that idealistic world outlook which, especially since the fall of the world of antiquity, has dominated men's minds. It still rules them to such a degree that even the most materialistic natural scientists of the Darwinian school are still unable to form any clear idea of the origin of man, because under this ideological influence they do not recognise the part that has been played therein by labour.

Animals, as has already been pointed out, change the environment by their activities in the same way, even if not to the same extent, as man does, and these changes, as we have seen, in turn react upon and change those who made them. In nature nothing takes place in isolation. Everything affects and is affected by every other thing, and it is mostly because this manifold motion and interaction is forgotten that our natural scientists are prevented from gaining a clear insight into the simplest things. We have seen how goats have prevented the regeneration of forests in Greece; on the island of St. Helena, goats and pigs brought by the first arrivals have succeeded in exterminating its old vegetation almost completely, and so have prepared the ground for the spreading of plants brought by later sailors and colonists. But animals exert a lasting effect on their environment unintentionally and, as far as the animals themselves are concerned, accidentally. The further removed men are from animals, however, the more their effect on nature assumes the character of premeditated, planned action directed towards definite preconceived ends. The animal destroys the vegetation of a locality without realising what it is doing. Man destroys it in order to sow field crops on the soil thus released, or to plant trees or vines which he knows will yield many times the amount planted. He transfers useful plants and domestic animals from one country

to another and thus changes the flora and fauna of whole continents. More than this. Through artificial breeding both plants and animals are so changed by the hand of man that they become unrecognisable. The wild plants from which our grain varieties originated are still being sought in vain. There is still some dispute about the wild animals from which our very different breeds of dogs or our equally numerous breeds of horses are descended.

It goes without saying that it would not occur to us to dispute the ability of animals to act in a planned, premeditated fashion. On the contrary, a planned mode of action exists in embryo wherever protoplasm, living albumen, exists and reacts, that is, carries out definite, even if extremely simple, movements as a result of definite external stimuli. Such reaction takes place even where there is yet no cell at all, far less a nerve cell. There is something of the planned action in the way insect-eating plants capture their prey, although they do it quite unconsciously. In animals the capacity for conscious, planned action is proportional to the development of the nervous system, and among mammals it attains a fairly high level. While fox-hunting in England one can daily observe how unerringly the fox makes use of its excellent knowledge of the locality in order to elude its pursuers, and how well it knows and turns to account all favourable features of the ground that cause the scent to be lost. Among our domestic animals, more highly developed thanks to association with man, one can constantly observe acts of cunning on exactly the same level as those of children. For, just as the development history of the human embryo in the mother's womb is only an abbreviated repetition of the history, extending over millions of years, of the bodily development of our animal ancestors, starting from the worm, so the mental development of the human child is only a still more abbreviated repetition of the intellectual development of these same ancestors, at least of the later ones. But all the planned action of all animals has never succeeded in impressing the stamp of their will upon the earth. That was left for man.

In short, the animal merely *uses* its environment, and brings about changes in it simply by its presence; man by his changes makes it serve his ends, *masters* it. This is the final, essential distinction between man and other animals, and once again it is labour that brings about this distinction.

Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us. Each victory, it is true, in the first place brings about the results we expected, but in the second and third places it has quite different, unforeseen effects which only too often cancel the first. The people who, in Mesopotamia, Greece, Asia Minor and elsewhere, destroyed the forests to obtain cultivable land, never dreamed that by removing along with the forests the collecting centres and reservoirs of moisture they were

laying the basis for the present forlorn state of those countries. When the Italians of the Alps used up the pine forests on the southern slopes, so carefully cherished on the northern slopes, they had no inkling that by doing so they were cutting at the roots of the dairy industry in their region; they had still less inkling that they were thereby depriving their mountain springs of water for the greater part of the year, and making it possible for them to pour still more furious torrents on the plains during the rainy seasons. Those who spread the potato in Europe were not aware that with these farinaceous tubers they were at the same time spreading scrofula. Thus at every step we are reminded that we by no means rule over nature like a conqueror over a foreign people, like someone standing outside nature – but that we, with flesh, blood and brain, belong to nature, and exist in its midst, and that all our mastery of it consists in the fact that we have the advantage over all other creatures of being able to learn its laws and apply them correctly.

And, in fact, with every day that passes we are acquiring a better understanding of these laws and getting to perceive both the more immediate and the more remote consequences of our interference with the traditional course of nature. In particular, after the mighty advances made by the natural sciences in the present century, we are more than ever in a position to realise, and hence to control, also the more remote natural consequences of at least our day-to-day production activities. But the more this progresses the more will men not only feel but also know their oneness with nature, and the more impossible will become the senseless and unnatural idea of a contrast between mind and matter, man and nature, soul and body, such as arose after the decline of classical antiquity in Europe and obtained its highest elaboration in Christianity.

It required the labour of thousands of years for us to learn a little of how to calculate the more remote natural effects of our actions in the field of production, but it has been still more difficult in regard to the more remote social effects of these actions. We mentioned the potato and the resulting spread of scrofula. But what is scrofula compared to the effects which the reduction of the workers to a potato diet had on the living conditions of the popular masses in whole countries, or compared to the famine the potato blight brought to Ireland in 1847, which consigned to the grave a million Irishmen, nourished solely or almost exclusively on potatoes, and forced the emigration overseas of two million more? When the Arabs learned to distil spirits, it never entered their heads that by so doing they were creating one of the chief weapons for the annihilation of the aborigines of the then still undiscovered American continent. And when afterwards Columbus discovered this America, he did not know that by doing so he was giving a new lease of life to slavery, which in Europe had long ago been done away with, and laying the basis for the Negro slave trade. The men who in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries laboured to create the steam-engine had no idea that they were preparing the

instrument which more than any other was to revolutionise social relations throughout the world. Especially in Europe, by concentrating wealth in the hands of a minority and dispossessing the huge majority, this instrument was destined at first to give social and political domination to the bourgeoisie, but later, to give rise to a class struggle between bourgeoisie and proletariat which can end only in the overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the abolition of all class antagonisms. But in this sphere too, by long and often cruel experience and by collecting and analysing historical material, we are gradually learning to get a clear view of the indirect, more remote social effects of our production activity, and so are afforded an opportunity to control and regulate these effects as well.

This regulation, however, requires something more than mere knowledge. It requires a complete revolution in our hitherto existing mode of production, and simultaneously a revolution in our whole contemporary social order.

All hitherto existing modes of production have aimed merely at achieving the most immediately and directly useful effect of labour. The further consequences, which appear only later and become effective through gradual repetition and accumulation, were totally neglected. The original common ownership of land corresponded, on the one hand, to a level of development of human beings in which their horizon was restricted in general to what lay immediately available, and presupposed, on the other hand, a certain superfluity of land that would allow some latitude for correcting the possible bad results of this primeval type of economy. When this surplus land was exhausted, common ownership also declined. All higher forms of production, however, led to the division of the population into different classes and thereby to the antagonism of ruling and oppressed classes. Thus the interests of the ruling class became the driving factor of production, since production was no longer restricted to providing the barest means of subsistence for the oppressed people. This has been put into effect most completely in the capitalist mode of production prevailing today in Western Europe. The individual capitalists, who dominate production and exchange, are able to concern themselves only with the most immediate useful effect of their actions. Indeed, even this useful effect – inasmuch as it is a question of the usefulness of the article that is produced or exchanged – retreats far into the background, and the sole incentive becomes the profit to be made on selling.

Classical political economy, the social science of the bourgeoisie, in the main examines only social effects of human actions in the fields of production and exchange that are actually intended. This fully corresponds to the social organisation of which it is the theoretical expression. As individual capitalists are engaged in production and exchange for the sake of the immediate profit, only the nearest, most immediate results must first be taken into account. As long as the

individual manufacturer or merchant sells a manufactured or purchased commodity with the usual coveted profit, he is satisfied and does not concern himself with what afterwards becomes of the commodity and its purchasers. The same thing applies to the natural effects of the same actions. What cared the Spanish planters in Cuba, who burned down forests on the slopes of the mountains and obtained from the ashes sufficient fertiliser for one generation of very highly profitable coffee trees – what cared they that the heavy tropical rainfall afterwards washed away the unprotected upper stratum of the soil, leaving behind only bare rock! In relation to nature, as to society, the present mode of production is predominantly concerned only about the immediate, the most tangible result; and then surprise is expressed that the more remote effects of actions directed to this end turn out to be quite different, are mostly quite the opposite in character; that the harmony of supply and demand is transformed into the very reverse opposite, as shown by the course of each ten years' industrial cycle – even Germany has had a little preliminary experience of it in the "crash"; that private ownership based on one's own labour must of necessity develop into the expropriation of the workers, while all wealth becomes more and more concentrated in the hands of non-workers; that [... the manuscript breaks off here.]

Notes

1. In the 1870s, when this was written, British zoogeographer Philip Lutley Sclater put forth the theory that a continent (he called "Lemuria") existed which reached from modern Madagascar to India and Sumatra – and this continent has since submerged beneath the Indian Ocean.

From: <http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1876/part-played-labour/index.htm>

As far as the 'method for finding out the truth' is concerned, 'the matter stands on the same footing as the making of material tools.... For, in order to work iron, a hammer is needed, and the hammer cannot be forthcoming unless it has been made; but, in order to make it, there was need of another hammer and other tools, and so on to infinity. We might thus vainly endeavour to prove that men have no power of working iron.

'But as men at first made use of the instruments supplied by nature to accomplish very easy pieces of workmanship, laboriously and imperfectly, and then, when these were finished, wrought other things more difficult with less labour and greater perfection. . . . So, in like manner, the intellect, by its native strength, makes for itself intellectual instruments, whereby it acquires strength for performing other intellectual operations, and from these operations gets again fresh instruments, or the power of pushing its investigations further, and thus gradually proceeds till it reaches the summit of wisdom.'

**B. de Spinoza (1632-1677),
Improvement of the Understanding, Ethics and Correspondence.**

Jean Lave, Changing Practice, 2011

CU note:

The ISCAR ([International Society for Cultural and Activity Research](#)) is, broadly, a group of followers of the Soviet pioneers Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria, of which Vygotsky is the most famous and the most fashionable. The field is referred to as "Activity Theory". It involves philosophers, psychologists, anthropologists, educationalists, political scientists and others, but the common ground where all these overlap is pedagogical theory, normally taken as the theory of teaching and learning. In view of what Jean Lave has written, we might rather simply say: theory of learning.

The Activity Theorists have a publication called "[Mind, Culture, and Activity](#)", and they hold congresses, such as the one in Rome in 2011, from which Jean Lave's writing, below, is a (here considerably redacted) part. The full document is a summary of the conference. It can be viewed or downloaded in PDF from <http://lchc.ucsd.edu/MCA/Journal/pdfs/19-2-lave.pdf>.

Parts of this lecture are similar to the lecture given by Professor Lave at her home university (University of California, Berkeley) which can be viewed as a video at <http://www.uctv.tv/shows/Everyday-Life-and-Learning-23201>. Dr Lave's video lecture is quite "accessible", and for most purposes probably easier to understand than the Congress speech.

The next ISCAR Congress will be in Australia, in 2014.

Changing Practice

Jean Lave

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This article is based on a keynote address given on the last day of the 2011 International Society for Culture & Activity Research (ISCAR) Congress in Rome. The first part reflects on the kind of work being presented at the conference. It was exciting and stimulating to learn about a rich range of new research in many different venues during the week. It also seemed important to reflect on what seemed to be missing, omissions that were common across the many themes and discussions. The second part of the article explores concrete examples of research, both in theory and in practice, which I hope may suggest to ISCAR participants some unusual possibilities for changing their own research practices between now and the next ISCAR congress in three years.

The genius of the International Society for Culture & Activity Research (ISCAR) may well lie in the long-term, theoretical/empirical engagement of its conference participants in crafting historical, material, and dialectical theory—theory that is concerned with the person (in practice, in the world), across generations, and across national and disciplinary boundaries. These efforts, at once theoretical and practical, are based on concerns about what is needed for engagement in a political struggle for a different, more inclusive, just, and habitable world.

Theory of activity, philosophy of praxis, and Marxist theory in its other various historical developments all embody a very broad vision of the production of social life. This is a vision not just of the mind, or of an historical institution, or of language as a thing in itself. Concentrating on the participation of these three in producing persons in practice historically implicates all of them in relation with one another. This mutual implication was reflected in ongoing efforts in Rome to broaden the scope of their social analysis across conventional conceptual and disciplinary boundaries, trying to bridge these boundaries, working to make connections that might change them, or at least to reassure participants that as theorist/practitioners we do share common theoretical and political concerns.

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What was missing? Briefly, historical specificity and political analysis. ISCAR stands for a cultural-historical approach to research, yet I heard many acknowledgments of the historical character of persons in practice in the world in terms that were merely fleeting and abstract.

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REVOLUTIONIZING PRAXIS

To establish something of an agenda for considering the issues I have raised there is no better place to start than Marx's third Thesis on Feuerbach. I quote (subject to changes in the sexist language of the standard translation):

"Thesis 3

"The materialist doctrine that people are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed people are products of other circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is people who change circumstances and that it is essential to educate the educator her/himself. Hence, this doctrine necessarily arrives at dividing society into two parts, one of which is superior to society. The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionizing practice. (Marx, 1845)"

An important methodological/theoretical inspiration for the project of revolutionizing practice that Marx says is necessary if we are to change both our circumstances and our activity is offered, I suggest, by Antonio Gramsci's writing. For those who are put off by a sort of vague popular assessment of Gramsci—probably either a weak Althusserian critique or an acceptance of Perry Anderson's (1976) old assessment, or Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) superficial reading, or just weak Gramscianism itself (Thomas, 2009), there are new resources at hand. Peter Thomas (2009) has produced an extraordinary historical-philosophical exposition of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis, in his recent book *The Gramscian Moment*. This work draws on a new generation of compilation and translation of Gramsci's work, which offers the advantage of being able to move beyond thematic excerpts from the *Notebooks* (e.g., Forgacs, 1985; Hoare & Smith, 1971) to Gerratana's (1975) complete transcription, and now an English translation of the entire *Notebooks* (Buttigieg, 1992, 1996, 2007).

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In his book, Peter Thomas underscores the importance of the Theses on Feuerbach, especially Thesis 3, for the development of Gramsci's philosophy of praxis. I can't think of a philosopher other than Gramsci who has put more effort into exploring the ramifications of "educating the educator," or who has located discussions of education in the context of changing practice, or who has given us as rich an account of what might be meant in Thesis 3 by "revolutionizing praxis." Gramsci's philosophy of praxis is a theory of learning and education. Philosophy of praxis aims to articulate commonly held sense from the stances of subaltern classes and is itself part of the struggle to give coherence to political work aimed at progressive change. For Gramsci, philosophy of praxis is also always political practice. Gramsci redefined politics, Thomas (2009) suggests, "not in terms of institutional power but as the reality of the transformation of human social relations and practices" (p. 97).

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Gramsci's political account of learning and education (and everything else) grew out of his analysis of the "absolute historicism" of philosophy of praxis. He pointed to the central engagement of state and private institutions of education in inculcating and defending dominant hegemonic relations of consent. That is not all that is going on in our complex contradictory world, of course. But because virtually all ISCAR participants do the work of these institutions, we also need to carry out the political analysis that our positions call for (cf. Rockwell's [2011] historical-political analysis of schooling). Gramsci articulated, with a rich language, the confusing and contradictory politics of our political locations and practices as academics, teachers, and researchers, and identified its core paradoxes and central questions. Are we traditional intellectuals? Are we democratic philosophers? Are we engaged in the

philosophical work of organizing subaltern ideas for alternative hegemonic ideologies/world views? How is it that we are, or might be, educators getting educated—what indeed does that mean? Gramsci had a lot to say about engaging in epochal struggles like those of our times—in fact, he might have said that they should be at the basis of our activity if we engage on his terms in philosophy of praxis. In our rapidly changing political times we need to be direct and serious about our own locations, activities, and the political effects of these on, and with, other people.

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...in the United States and in European countries, national, state, and private neoliberal forces are attacking the right to an education, rejecting the ideas that educated citizens are a public good and that research results are public goods (equating “the public good” with the commercialization of research findings). In direct and indirect ways neoliberal political and educational leaders are advancing scholarly and educational programs that will support and endorse profoundly conservative, plutocratic, and corporate goals. Tuition increases at public institutions of higher education have been so steep as to restrict this education to a small, wealthy elite. Steps are being taken at many universities to reduce fine arts, humanities, and the social sciences in favor of the “profit centers” of biology, engineering, physical sciences, and medicine. Within the social sciences, reorganization has given power and priority to positivist, conservative political scientists, sociologists, and economists, making ethnographic research difficult to defend and making it more precarious than ever to engage in politically challenging research on gender, race, and sexual orientation. A common technique (e.g., forced on Danish universities by their Ministry of Science [now the Ministry of Higher Education]) is to define narrowly (by majority vote of department faculty) those research journals that are deemed legitimate in assessments for promotion. The result is a narrow range of journals that completely or mostly excludes those that ISCAR participants read and for which they write. And I haven’t even mentioned the privatization of primary and secondary schooling, which is turning public schooling into a dismal residual institution.

* * *

I have been arguing for years (along with other ISCAR participants) that our biographies and professions make it all too tempting to project academic, conventional theoretical assumptions about learning and knowing onto “the rest” of the world. It requires careful effort to resist theoretical and empirical research practices that treat “learning” as if it were

1. A concept of individual, internal mental exercise.

2. Only ever produced as a result of typical bureaucratic, institutional arrangements and trajectories of schooling.
3. Produced in particular through teaching, viewed as a prerequisite for learning.
4. Something that can only be studied from a third-person perspective, thus producing accounts of learning only as something done to others.

Surely these assumptions are derived, at least in part, from the conduct of our particularly knowledge-obsessed professional lives. I believe that addressing these assumptions critically, and engaging in research from an ethnographic point of view, can have a practical revolutionizing effect.

* * *

Critical social psychologist Ole Dreier's theoretical/practical approach to what he calls "the conduct of everyday life" provides a particular example of such work, and anthropologist Tim Ingold's arguments about craftsmanship offer another. Both these researchers ground their work in relational, historical accounts of situated practice.

PERSONS IN MOTION: THE CONDUCT OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Ole Dreier is a well-known member of ISCAR. He recently retired as Professor of Personality Psychology at Copenhagen University. Although not an anthropologist, he approaches research in ways closely related to ethnographic practice. In his book *Psychotherapy in Everyday Life*, Dreier (2008) laid out theoretically, and through his day-to-day inquiry, a deeply considered theoretical and empirical account of "the conduct of everyday life." He insisted on examining what it means for persons to engage in the changing day-to-day trajectories of their lives. He showed how these unfold as people participate, differently and partially, in their everyday lives. Dreier does for theories of situated practice, what J. J. Gibson (1986) did for perception: He insisted on setting persons, in practice, *in motion* across and throughout their daily contexts. This shift in assumptions about the fundamental conditions of possibility for participation in social life radically challenges our customary site-constrained research practices. Here are just a few illustrations:

Dreier's theory/practice contrasts sharply with common habits of limiting our research practice to one or two settings and looking at activity only within one setting at a time. He insisted that tracing persons' movements across the various contexts of their everyday lives is necessary for understanding how participation changes in changing practice. Furthermore, this leads him to explore how persons are not "the same" in different situations: Their identities are partial and plural. Dreier's approach also makes it clear that moving from one everyday life context to another is not the only way persons try to, and do, connect and affect activities in

the different contexts in which they are participants. His perspective challenges educators' theories of "learning transfer," and it invites us to ask instead a question with different political implications than the customary ones: "How is going to school a (relatively small) part of the conduct of everyday life?" Dreier's work also makes us critically aware of the extent and the limitations of theorizing professional practices of all sorts from the location and perspective of only the professionals. He focused instead on the "first-person perspectives" of all concerned, including clients and other subalterns. His approach is rich in challenges that lead to fresh possibilities for revolutionizing research practice.

CRAFTSMANSHIP: SONG AND IMAGINATION

Interestingly, anthropologist Tim Ingold also begins with J. J. Gibson's theory of perception. Ingold's ethnographic and theoretical work has been focused for many years on the interface between evolutionary biology and anthropology. He has argued that evolution is not an individual, genetically programmed natural evolutionary process but rather that change is immanent in developmental processes that extend across persons, practices, and lifetimes. This theory deserves careful attention for its relations with developmental psychology and beyond. Here I discuss only one of the ways that Ingold develops this broad theoretical stance. It is notable that he consistently rejects conventional polar distinctions in favor of relational conceptions (and with them conventional politics of social Darwinism in its many guises). His work exemplifies changing constraints that produce new research questions. Ingold (2000) has acknowledged that in recent years, "Neo-Darwinian biology, cognitive science and psycholinguistics have conspired to produce an extremely powerful approach to understanding the relations, in human evolution, between technology, language and intelligence" (p. 407). But against this focus Ingold proposed instead "a radically alternative claim: Suppose . . . we set ourselves the task of examining the relation, in human evolution, not between technology, language and intelligence, but between craftsmanship, song and imagination. The resulting account, I suspect would be very different" (p. 408). Very different indeed. Ingold's approach surely challenges claims, ones with political roots in dominant hegemonic practices including our own. His work offers possibilities for educating ourselves by changing our circumstances and activities as Thesis 3 recommends.

* * *

It will be evident that the work of Dreier and Ingold is not *only* about "learning." To address the theory/practice of learning with respect to their work requires two things, then. First, we need to ask *how* learning *works* in the world *through* the conduct of everyday life (or dwelling, or skill) and, second, we need to ask how

conducting everyday lives, or craftsmanship take the forms and relations they do *because* they are in part practices of learning.

CRITICAL ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE: APPRENTICESHIP IN PRACTICE

To answer questions such as these requires detailed study of the processes of everyday living and doing. But if relational theory insists on the historical, processual character of human praxis, and on the inseparability of theory and practice, this poses a difficult methodological challenge.

This concern shaped the structure of my book *Apprenticeship in Critical Ethnographic Practice* (Lave, 2011). The idea was to look at theoretical practical relations of apprenticeship *in* practice. The title of the book sums up its several concerns. It is about the practice of apprenticeship among Vai and Gola tailors in Liberia in the 1970s, learning to make trousers and becoming master tailors. It also explores the process of ethnographic inquiry that unfolded over five years, furnishing an example for apprentice ethnographers of sustained and changing ethnographic work—itself also a kind of apprenticeship.

I chose to concentrate my ethnographic research on tailors' apprenticeship originally in opposition to roughly the five commonsense assumptions laid out above. These assumptions are often encapsulated in comparative binary characterizations of informal education as the devalued foil for Western schooling, styled "formal education."

* * *

CONCLUSIONS

I cannot think of a better agenda for each and every one of us, those who attended ISCAR and those who read *Mind, Culture, and Activity*—than setting out to educate the educator—that is to say, ourselves. But how? I began this article by suggesting that, as part of changing our activity in changing circumstances, we need to consider the most politically critical sites of political change, that is, we need to make familiar and recognizable our own everyday possibilities for "revolutionary praxis" and take them up in our research practice. I've pointed to some of the questions about learning that have grown out of recent ethnographic research, questions that challenge common sense, including academic common sense. These questions suggest some "next steps" in seeking understandings of persons in practice in the world, steps toward combining ISCAR's strength in keeping people in practice as the focus of research with a recognition that the conduct of research is an engagement in political practice.

But, in the face of our collective “silence” to which I referred earlier, the biggest step may well be that of developing new research that asks what the processes are by which persons are produced and produce themselves in historical and political terms. Then we might become able to take up the same critical concerns with respect to our own circumstances, possibilities, and responsibilities, as researchers and teachers. Consider the modest proposal—made by Gosselain, by Ingold, and by me—that we take seriously the understanding of research as craft, and of both learning and changing identity as aspects of craftsmanship. Gosselain has recently articulated some of our basic commitments and present dilemmas as researchers in a call for Slow Science.

This is becoming a popular cause among academics in many fields, in many parts of the world. The Slow Science movement maintains that scientific inquiry is necessarily a slow, methodological, and thoughtful process, one that is directed not toward quick fixes but at the solution of deeper, more troubling, and yet less visible paradoxes and contradictions. Good craftsmanship takes time, and it takes time to become a skilled craftsman. Each of us has much to learn, but together we can help ourselves and one another to understand more adequately our own political situations and struggles and those of the people whose lives we study.

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